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Keeping the Wheels Turning At Central Vermont Public Service Corporation (Part 1)



DAVID ZSIDO

Vermont Hydro Electric's No. 26 which was a Model T Ford. The side of the vehicle is identified as "Gas & Electric Meter Service". The uniformed workers look more like police officers. This photo is from about 1924.

About the Author

David G. Zsido was born in Proctor. He is a graduate of Mount St. Joseph Academy and Norwich University. David has authored "Antique Trucks: A Different Kind of Horsepower", "The Early Years of Company C 368th Engineer Battalion, U.S. Army Reserve in Rutland, Vermont", "The Secrets of Glen Station", "Cinderella's Sweets", "The 486th Anti-Anything Battalion", "F.A. Tucker Inc., General Contractors", "One Last Coffee at the Midway Diner", "Titans of Rutland Trucking (1930-1993)", "Proctor American Legion Post 6 Baseball History" and "Heavy Metal Memories At Mac Equipment and Steel".

David is a retiree from Central Vermont Public Service Corporation and has a large collection photos and information about the company and its history.

Introduction

Central Vermont Public Service (CVPS) came into being on 20 August 1929, two months before the crash of the Stock Market. Samuel Insull, national power speculator, joined together eight small utility companies as the basis of his new corporation. During the many years that followed, these eight companies were joined by scores of other small companies, as CVPS continued to expand. An examination of the very complex corporate 'Family Tree' of CVPS reveals perhaps one hundred or more companies. A sizeable handful of these predecessor companies had roots that dated back prior to the start of the twentieth century, the earliest in 1850. From the beginnings of these predecessor companies, it seemed rather apparent that to keep the lights on, vehicle transportation was and continued to remain a vital component of normal operations. The CVPS vehicle history encompasses everything from horse drawn wagons, to the early 'high wheeler' types of trucks, from early flat-head V-8's to its first bucket and digger truck concepts, from large diesel-powered trucks to electric vehicles, and on to modern day hybrids.

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Keeping the Wheels Turning At Central Vermont Public Service Corporation (Part 1)

By David G. Zsido

Dave Zsido first became aware of the existence of several extremely early photographs, including some from a few of the company's predecessor organizations during the mid-1980s. One day, Peter Chase, the son of a deceased retiree and former Safety Director, Roy Chase, came into the Safety Department with a large cardboard box stuffed with old photographs. He presented the carton to then Safety Director, John Jankowski. One photograph in particular captured a line crew consisting of three workers with a horse and wagon. Fortunately, the three-person crew was identified. Unfortunately, the photographer failed to provide the name of the horse!



DAVID ZSIDO

In June of 1909 this photo of a Rutland Railway Light and Power Company line crew identified the following members (left to right): Frank Sullivan, Patrick Dunn and Dan Bruten.

Another pair of photographs showed a crew, probably from the Rutland Railway Light and Power Company, with their 'Little Giant' truck from about 1912. Once again, someone had the foresight to provide the identities of the crew members in the photograph. Naturally, Zsido asked to borrow the photographs to make copies of each.



DAVID ZSIDO

A Rutland Light and Power line crew on 8 August 1912 with a Chicago Pneumatic "Little Giant". From the left: Ed Tiernan(driver), Sim Caton, Charles Mumford, Walter Weinle, Abe Weinle, Henry Thornton, unidentified, Harry Soulia, unidentified, Hugh Parry, Bill Hogan, Bill Murphy, and Dan Bruten.

Over the years, Zsido had been given or afforded the opportunity to view and borrow numerous other photographs from other employees and retirees. His former supervisor, Thomas Borst, provided him with a small wooden box of black and white negatives taken during the construction of the Grandpa's Knob Wind Generation facility in 1941.

A retired Hydro Engineer, J. Douglas Graham, handed him several photos showing the reconstruction of the Chittenden Dam following the 1927 Flood. A former Administrative Assistant, Colleen Pawlusiak, had a family member, who had a great image, which displayed a sizeable group of 1935 to 1937 Ford trucks at the former Company Operating Headquarters at Cleveland Avenue in Rutland.



A pair of Linn tractors work on the reconstruction of the head-wall at the Chittenden Dam on 6 December 1928.



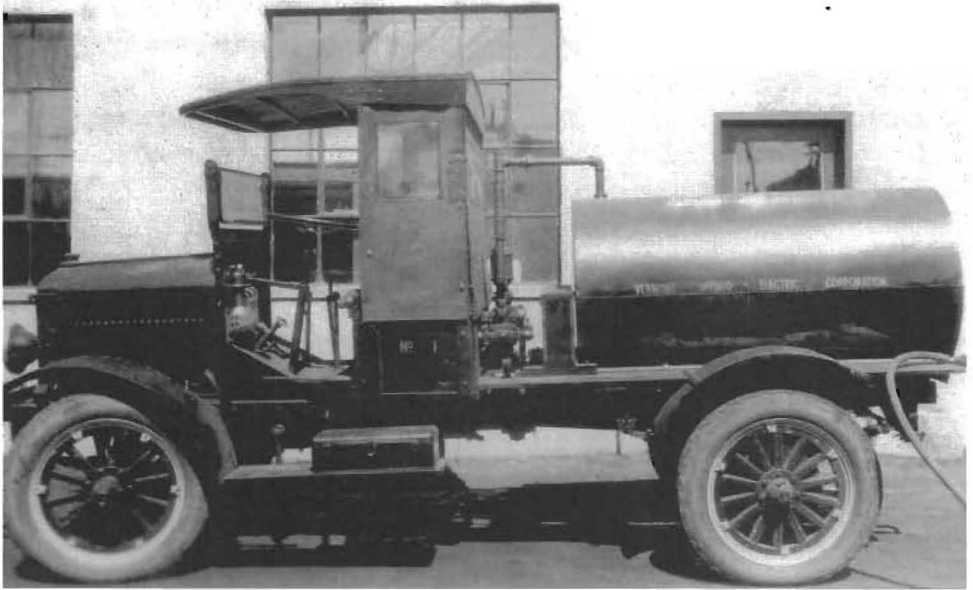
A line-up of various 1935-1937 Ford trucks at the Cleveland Avenue facility of the Central Vermont Public Service Company in Rutland in the late 1930s.

When Transportation Director, Eric 'Rick' Anderson, retired in 2003, he dropped off a large box of photographs, negatives, and photo albums. Rick had amassed this huge collection of hundreds of photographs during his many years in the Transportation Department. He also gave Zsido his personal collection of framed photographs, which had been displayed in the Transportation Department's hallway in the Systems Building on Post Road. Finally, after years of procrastinating, Zsido decided to organize the collection and provide a brief glimpse of more than 100 years of the changing images of transportation in Vermont's electric utility industry.

A streetcar company, a gas light company, and an electric distribution company were all part of the initial composition of CVPS. These entities were all located in the community of Rutland; perhaps operating from the facility at the southwest end of Cleveland Avenue. Curiously, one of the predecessor companies, whose formation dates back further than that of any other member of the Family Tree, was the Rutland Gas Light Company. It was formed prior to the Civil War on 25th of November 1858. Other predecessor companies were involved with providing retail electrical service beginning in the 1880's. One such company was the Rutland Electric Light Company, which was formed on 6th of July 1885. Another such small electric company was the Rutland Railway Light & Power Company, which was created during the early years of the twentieth century on 27th of January 1906.

The transportation history of many of the predecessor companies for the first thirty years of the twentieth Century is extremely obscure. Only a small handful of photographs from that period have survived the eighty plus years that followed. Fortunately, those surviving photographs offer vivid images of the early years of transportation in the utility arena in Vermont. Apparently, the first truck appears to be a Little Giant, which was manufactured by Chicago Pneumatic Tool Company. Chicago Pneumatic manufactured trucks between 1910 and 1918. Very few may have made their way to Rutland. Curiously, Zsido had always wondered if he had located the remains of that truck in 1985 on the Galick Brothers Farm in West Haven, Vermont. The Galick Brothers had purchased a used Chicago Pneumatic for its engine, which they installed on their small boat to power it on Lake Champlain. A substantial portion of the truck chassis remained on the farm, which Dave Zsido eventually acquired. However, he could never confirm that it was the same one in the photograph.

Another pre-1920 truck that was owned by the Vermont Hydro Electric Company was captured in a photograph taken at the Cleveland Avenue facility in Rutland. The small Vim tanker truck is probably about 1915 in vintage. Vim trucks were manufactured from 1914 through 1926.



DAVID ZSIDO

A Vermont Hydro Electric Company Vim tanker truck parked at the Cleveland Avenue facility in 1914.



DAVID ZSIDO

Another photo from the 'teens' was discovered in the former stockroom of Twin State Gas & Electric in Bennington

It had always been assumed that it was a Twin State truck in this photograph. However, a closer examination revealed that the small pre- 1920 GMC chain drive truck was lettered #5 - Cumberland County Power & Light Company, a Maine utility. It isn't known as to whether the truck was acquired by Twin State from Cumberland County, or if one of the line workers from that company was subsequently employed by Twin State.

Other photographs of the Twin State Gas & Electric Company, taken in Bennington, Vermont, show a handsome 1920s vintage Chevrolet service truck pulling out of the garage there.

The 1920s was a period of time during which Vermont encountered its greatest natural catastrophe. The great flood of 1927, which occurred 3-4 of November, was of record-setting proportions. Along with the washout of thousands of homes and businesses, a couple of the predecessor companies also faced damage to their hydroelectric dams. One small impoundment in Hampton, New York, owned by Vermont Hydro Electric, apparently experienced some substantial flooding damage. A small group of Model TT Ford Trucks was photographed as they assembled near the headwall at Carvers Falls where they were drawing ballast for a temporary cofferdam. This particular hydro generating complex was developed during the early 1890s.



DAVID ZSIDO

On 10th of December 1927 five Model TT Ford trucks truck rock for the coffer dam at the Carver Falls Hydro site in the flood reconstruction.

In another 1927 Flood damage photograph, a Linn Tractor works on rebuilding the Chittenden Dam headwall. There was at least a pair of these Linn Tractors in use on the rebuilding project (See the top photo on page 5). These may have been owned by the Vermont Marble Company or possibly a local contractor. The reservoir there is approximately 750 acres in size, located in what is known as the Wildcat Watershed.

With the advent of the 1930s, shortly after CVPS emerged as an identifiable provider of electricity, a distinctive pattern of preferred vehicles seemed to be evident. A few photos capture a fleet of Ford trucks owned by CVPS. One particular photograph at the Cleveland Avenue Garage shows a line-up of several 1935 to 1937 Ford trucks and pickups (See the bottom photo on page 5). While it can't be substantiated, possibly these units may have been acquired through John C. Stewart & Son of Cuttingsville, a nearby Ford truck dealer. Ford seems to have remained the vehicle of choice for CVPS from the 1930s to the late 1950s.

In another extremely curious photograph, a large piece of substation apparatus is being moved through the streets of Rutland.



DAVID ZSIDO

A huge piece of electrical apparatus was slung between an AB Mack and a 1937 Ford for movement through the streets of Rutland.

This tall transformer was cradled, actually slung, between two trucks. An AB Mack appeared to be providing the power, and possibly a 1937 Ford was being operated backwards seeming to act only as a trailer. It is doubtful that the AB Mack was owned by CVPS. However, J. M. Giddings of North Springfield, Vermont was a heavy rigging company, which often did work of this type, and possibly may have owned the Mack.

As growth and innovation became somewhat of a hallmark of Central Vermont's business direction, the 1940s became a period, which fully addressed both goals. During the early 1940s, the small electric company developed plans to harness wind energy on Grandpa's Knob, just west of Rutland. The facility was heralded as the first commercial wind generation site in the United States. A dynamic photograph captured the journey up the final steep grade to the mountain peak.



DAVID ZSIDO

An Autocar tractor gets a little help from a Linn and an International crawler hauling a wind turbine up the final grade at Grandpa's Knob in the early 1940s.

An Autocar tractor had to be hitched to a Linn tractor, which was in turn hooked to an International crawler in order to make the grade. The equipment was more than likely owned and operated by contractors. In talking with Glenn Anderson about the history of this endeavor, he recalled being told that once the windmill was placed into service, daily checks had to be performed on the blades. Len Ransom, a transformer shop employee, would stop the windmill from turning, and then walk out onto each blade and perform a visual inspection.

After a catastrophic blade failure in the mid-1940s, the site was abandoned. Then some twenty-five years later, in the late 1960s the mountain peak was reactivated to serve as a telecommunications site. CVPS hired F.A. Tucker to extend power lines to the peak, and David Zsido happened to be on the pole setting crew for the project. He could vividly recall the about 1950 Chevy line truck with the “A” frame – winch operated boom, which was the crew’s sole vehicle for the pole-setting. The used truck had come out of service from the New England Telephone Company and was desperately lacking in power. It couldn’t climb the final five hundred feet or so up the steep grade leading to the peak in a forward gear. Basically, Zsido had to back the truck up the mountain the final distance.

During the years of Word War II, as numerous other companies across the nation experienced a thinning of their employee ranks, CVPS too faced the same situation. As many as fifty CVPS employees were called to support the war effort. Upon returning from the war, these employees may have been instrumental in convincing the company to utilize some of the innovations of wartime technology.

In 1946 CVPS became the first utility in New England to have its service vehicles dispatched by mobile radios.



DAVID ZSIDO

The CVPS base station dispatcher at the left and the CVPS lineworker in a military surplus vehicle at the right captured the first use of mobile radios by a utility in Northern New England in 1946.

A few years later, as the nation was growing economically, effective advertising became a key part of that growth. Perhaps no later than 1952, as part of an advertising endeavor, CVPS aligned itself with the Reddy Kilowatt image.



DAVID ZSIDO

The equipment decal typically used on Central Vermont Public Service vehicles during the 1950s and 1960s.

For years the Reddy image was stenciled onto the doors of the company vehicles. The distinctive and easily identifiable logo was used in a wide variety of advertisements that changed periodically as the advertising panels were easily removed to accommodate any updates. The 1954 image touted, “Electric Cooking is Cheaper”. ‘Reddy’ remained attached to the company’s equipment until the early 1970s.

For a short time in the mid-1970s after the “Reddy Kilowatt” era, a newly designed company logo replaced the usual advertisements with a theme, “CV and You – Partners in Energy”. Then in 1979, on the 50th Anniversary of the Company, a special door decal was developed. This decal depicted a line worker working from a pole with the lettering: “1929 – 1979 First Fifty”. This concept was utilized on vehicles for more than six years. Finally in 1987, the logo concept, which was utilized through 2012, was introduced. The pattern of three reversed “Z’s”, superimposed on each other would herald CVPS as a ‘Diversified Energy Company’.



The CVPS Chester, Vermont, line crew with their Jeep pick-up service truck.



1960 CVPS Chevy line truck.



The CVPS Chester, Vermont, line crew with their 1947 Ford line truck. Photo taken about 1953.



Roy Chase and Harold Durgin inspect a fairly new Chevrolet line truck at Cleveland Avenue facility on 6 November 1952.



A 1950 photo of the first CVPS prime mover, No. 31, which was about a 1948 Ford F-8 that was hitched to a portable substation at the Cleveland Avenue facility.



An April 1958 photo of the CVPS transmission (Hi-Line) crews' Dodge Power Wagon parked on Cleveland Avenue.

Throughout the 1950s, vehicles were still largely used only to transport workers and their equipment to various job sites as CVPS expanded its overhead lines to sparsely populated rural Vermont communities. The line workers still had to climb every pole with their climbers, or 'hooks' as they are generally called them. The majority of poles were still set by hand, that is, they were raised by a group of men, and guided into the pole hole with pike poles and a 'dead man' support device. If the crew was fortunate, it may have been assigned a line truck with an "A" frame, that is a cable-operated boom to hoist the pole into an upright position. A select few of these types of trucks were equipped with an auger for digging pole holes.

Looking back, the 1950s were perhaps the pinnacle years for gasoline-powered trucks, which were equipped with hydraulic brakes and cable operated booms. With the expansion of the electric distribution system and the associated development of related electric transmission facilities, due to increasing residential and commercial/industrial demands, taller poles with heavier class ratings would necessitate the implementation of more versatile and functional utility style trucks. CVPS was approaching the threshold of introducing those vehicular advancements into its fleet.